

THE SAFEGUARD OF THE ROCK-HEWN CHURCHES OF THE GÖREME VALLEY

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THE ART-HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ROCK-CUT CHURCHES IN GÖREME

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1. INTRODUCTION

When the Frenchman, Lucas, published his travel diary in 1714, the western world's attention was drawn to the hitherto unknown region of Cappadocia, in Turkey. As a result of the interest aroused, travellers and researchers visited the region during the nineteenth century, including Hamilton, Ainsworth and Texier [1]. In the same century, Lebides, both director and principal lecturer of the Greek School in Kaiseri, published a book mentioning the region's churches and monasteries for the first time [2]. During the early twentieth century, the first art-historical appreciations of the monuments were expounded by Rott and Jerphanion [3]. In 1925, the most significant churches in Göreme – Elmalı and Tokalı – had been included in a general description of Byzantine Arts [4].

The historical development and topography of Cappadocia during the Middle Ages have not yet been satisfactorily studied. Arab and Byzantine sources from the seventh to the eleventh centuries mainly deal with political history, which is of little use in evaluating the social and economic situation of the Christian population [5]. The decline of archives and libraries in the Near East meant fewer sources regarding ecclesiastic foundations in the region.

Very few archaeological aspects of Cappadocia in the Middle Ages have yet been investigated, with no scientific excavations having been made of mediaeval settlements in the region. This is very regrettable, considering that Cappadocia was one of the Byzantine Empire's most important religious centres. So far, 780 churches or monasteries have been identified, but only a quarter of the monuments are conserved.

To ensure the preservation of these monuments, immediate action to protect them must be taken [6]. Because of its frescoes and inscriptions, as well as for its landscape, Göreme can be considered a special case amongst the settlements in Cappadocia. Thirty-seven buildings were mentioned in a work by Jerphanion (1925-1942), and more recent publications bring the total to 57 [7].

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The aim of this report is to present a short overview of the importance of the rock-cut fabric within the history of architecture and painting.

2. ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

2.1 Construction types

Göreme's rock-cut churches show nine variations on the five basic Byzantine ground plans. Single-naved churches with a transverse (13 examples) or longitudinal (11 examples) naos, and cross-domed churches (8 examples) are the most common. Centralized buildings of circular, octagonal, tetragonal or triconchos construction are unknown [8]. A rectangular, long-shaped room with an apse at one end and the entrance at the opposite end is the most elementary church form. The naos may be longitudinally (Type 1a, e.g., church N° 9) or transversely rectangular (Type 1b, e.g., the New Tokalı). The double-naved church with two apses either divided (Type 2a) or not (Type 2b) by a row of arcades, represents the second church type. Both variants are found in at least one instance amongst Göreme's churches (St Eustachios and church N° 35a in the Necropolis). The third group are the three-naved basilicas (Type 3), such as the church of the Aynalı monastery. There are two variations to be seen among the cross-in-square shaped churches with free cross arms: in the first case, cross-arms spread from a central square to each side (Type 4a), such as the church of St Katherina; in the second case, the apse integrates without interconnection of the eastern arm into the central square, as for example the El Nazar church. Two forms of cross-domed construction constitute the fifth group: the Kılıçlar church is a four-pillar-support building (Type 5a) and St Barbara is a two-pillar-support building (Type 5b).

2.2 Origin of construction types

Despite the loss of the masonry churches, Göreme's conserved rock-hewn constructions provide evidence of the various construction types. No single-naved masonry church of a transversely rectangular ground plan has survived in Cappadocia, but 17 rock-hewn churches of this type are known. Thirteen of them are located in Göreme, with the others in Kepez, Açıksaray and Elevra [9].

The so-called transept-construction has its origin in northern Mesopotamia. Tur Abdin and Cappadocia are the only regions in Asia minor where this construction type is found. There is no example in the capital¹ [10].

The view adopted by scientists is that the construction type was introduced into Asia Minor by master masons coming from Syria [11]. The earliest examples of double-naved ground plans were in Syria during the early fifth century. It was quite common in Tur Abdin, while it had appeared in Isauria by the end of the fifth century (Alhan Monastery Baptisterium) and immediately afterwards in Cappadocia [12].

¹ Istanbul [Constantinople] being the capital during that period.

The Nea church (880) in the capital provides the earliest example of a cross-domed construction. Similar examples in Asia Minor are the churches of Side and Tirilye. Göreme's Kılıçlar (900) is the first rock-hewn example. Vault systems that are not conserved amongst the masonry churches can be observed in the rock constructions. The five-domed Nea church is very similar to the Kızlar and Elmalı churches in Göreme.

The free modelling of the cross-arms and corner room vaults should be noted. These arms, which are usually covered by barrel or cross-vaults, are vaulted by domes in the cases of the Elmalı, Kızlar and Çarıklı churches. The double-pillar construction found in northern Syria since early Christian times is rarely found in Asia Minor. The only known examples are two masonry churches in Lykaonia: the Eustathios in Meran, and the Amphilochios in Konya. Three rock-hewn churches of this type have been conserved: Barbara and Çarıklı in Göreme, and the Cambazlı in Ortahisar.

2.3 Vault systems

The vaulting of rock-hewn churches combines barrel, dome, cross-vault and flat-roof forms. Çarıklı's eastern cross-arm and all cross-arms of the Kızlar and Elmalı churches are topped with domes. In the case of Elmalı, even the corner rooms are domed, so that a nine-domed interior is created. Flat roofs may top the corner rooms as well as single-naved churches of this type, as, for instance, Saklı and church N° 3.

Göreme offers solutions that would be impossible to achieve in masonry: for instance a short dome integrated into a flat-roofed or barrel vault (e.g., Kılıçlar and N° 27, as well as Kızlar). Two examples of a vaulted nave and flat-roofed aisles can be observed in Old Tokalı and Aynalı.

The connecting elements were copied from brick architecture, such as the dome on pendentives (Kızlar; El Nazar; N° 5a and 6a), or on modelled triangles (Old Tokalı; N° 25). These triangles are also used to connect flat roof or barrel-vaults (Elmalı; Karanlık; Barbara; Kızlar), and, in the case of church N° 5a, the dome is placed on a drum.

2.4 Sculpted architectural elements

Rock-hewn churches show imitations of static elements of architecture: New Tokalı's transverse barrel vault is "supported" by two belt arches, similar to the Aynalı. The dome's arches rest on wall pilasters or dossierets, as in El Nazar and Karanlık. The columns of the Kızlar, Karanlık and Kılıçlar churches show dossieret capitals with an abacus, and the Kılıçlar Kushluk has a cubiform capital. Some of Göreme's churches have rich decorations on their exteriors and interiors. New Tokalı's interior walls are broken up by pilasters, arched niches and corniches, blind arches and carved crosses. Short columns and pilaster arcades decorate the interior surfaces of domes (N° 15a and 35b; Katherina) or those of the drum (N° 5a). Elsewhere, neatly carved consoles decorate the wall corners (Katherina) or the dome (Kılıçlar).

Arcades, pilasters and corniches form the exterior walls of the monastic foundations of Karanlık, Çarıklı and Aynalı. There are also cross reliefs above entrances, as seen in the Katherina church.

2.5 Liturgical elements

Rock-hewn churches have conserved liturgical elements, such as altars, ikonostases, and synthroni, which were destroyed in their masonry counterparts. Towards the naos, the apse is usually delimited by two massive slabs. Göreme's cross-shaped churches, such as Barbara, Katherina, Çarıklı, № 25 and 27, show the most elaborate examples of those pierced, high ikonostases. Kızlar contains a completely conserved ikonostasis, decorated with cross reliefs and polychromy [16]. In New and Old Tokalı, as well as Kılıçlar, the sanctuary is separated by a high row of arcades. In most of the churches, rock altars and a seat or rock-hewn benches along the walls of the naos are conserved. Only Karanlık and New Tokalı contain single seats with armrests for high-ranking clergymen [17]. The passages through the apses of Karanlık and № 25, the added northern apse of El Nazar, as well as Old Tokalı's font, are the result of liturgical needs.

2.6 Graveyards

The rock-cut churches provide evidence of the burial tradition during the Byzantine period [18]. Constructions like № 35 within the necropolis and Tokalı contain grave-churches. The Tokalı conserves floor and arcosolium tombs and a separate grave-chamber. One nave of the Eustathios church was used as a grave-chamber, as in most of Cappadocia's double-naved churches. Old Tokalı, Karanlık, № 18 and 27 all contain separate grave chambers. Traditionally, there are no tombs within the naos, but often the narthex is used for grave laying, as in the case of Daniel, Katherina, Old Tokalı, № 9 and 27.

2.7 Monasteries

The four monastic foundations of Göreme – Aynalı, Çarıklı, Karanlık and the monastery situated 50 m from Kılıçlar – group their common rooms around an open courtyard [19]. Very little is yet published about the Kızlar monastic foundation. Various rooms and chambers are situated within a rock cone. The main church of Archangel's monastery (mentioned in an inscription) was the Tokalı. None of the monastic buildings are conserved [21].

An extensive overview of Cappadocia's rock-cut monasteries is provided by Rodley (1985). However, many questions are still to be answered. There is still insufficient knowledge of the social and religious position of the monasteries within the region. The number and mission (duty) of the clergymen, as well as their relationship with architecture, is still unknown. The variety in number and form of the monastic constructions are clearly illustrated by the excellent ground-plans in Rodley's book, but we know almost nothing about their function. The author only distinguishes churches, "trapezes," entrance halls and grave-chambers.

3. MURAL PAINTINGS

3.1 Inscriptions

No comprehensive survey of inscriptions in Göreme and Cappadocia has yet been published. Göreme offers two dated inscriptions: one within the Eustathios, the other in the Kızlar church. Tokalı contains two inscriptions, naming the donor and the painter of the church. A further 23 representations of donors are conserved in Göreme, 15 of which bear inscriptions [21]. The inscriptions rarely contain information about the social status of the donor. Inscriptions located within the apse and the narthex of Karanlık church merely state that the donors were Nikephoros, a presbyter, and John, an entalmakios [22].

The rich clothes of the donors give evidence of their aristocratic origin, such as John in the Karanlık, and Theognostos, represented in the Çarıklı church. Images of female donors, such as Eudokia, Anna and Eronikea (within Daniel, Katherina, Kılıçlar Kushluk) prove the importance of women amongst the donors [23].

The existence of all these significant architectural and decorative elements underscores the general importance of Göreme as a repository of cultural heritage, and so the historical value of Göreme's inscriptions should be emphasized and attention drawn to the need to support the Göreme project for urgent protective measures [24].

3.2 Cycles and iconographic programmes

Three of Göreme's churches are of unique significance because of the preservation of the numerous frescos. New Tokalı has 49 scenes, Old Tokalı 34, and Kılıçlar 33. The only comparable church of Cappadocia would be the Hac Kilise in Mavrucan, where 33 scenes are preserved [25].

Besides Christological series, scenes from the Old Testament are also represented. Elmalı has the Philoxenie and the Three young men within the fire, as well as scenes from the Virgin Mary's life. The earliest example of a Virgin Mary series in Cappadocia is located in Kızılçukur, in the Joachim and Anne church [26]. Single Virgin Mary scenes are preserved in Kepez (Sarıca church), Kılıçlar and church N° 9 in Göreme. New Tokalı's Pentecost scene has no equivalent elsewhere in Byzantine monumental painting [27].

The iconographic programme of Göreme's churches contains hagiological scenes. Eleven scenes from St Basil's life can be seen in New Tokalı's naos. Although the cycle's conservation status is poor, with only five scenes preserved, it is important as the representation is unique in the Cappadocia region. Only two other scenes of Basil's life are conserved, namely in Ortahisar's cave-church, named Balkandere [28]. Scenes from St George's life are preserved in churches N° 9 and 16 of Göreme. The only analogous depictions were found in the Karagedik church in İhlara valley [29].

The dating of the frescoes requires, beside stylistic and iconographic analyses, a close study of their stylized iconographic programmes. The numerous cycles

preserved in the various Göreme rock-hewn churches offer an ideal subject for research [30].

The sequential arrangement of scenes within the church (the iconographic programme), the choice of scenes, their biblical quotations and the emphasizing of single scenes, all these may provide evidence about their date of origin. New Tokalı's Crucifixion scene, complemented by four Passion scenes, decorates the church's main apse. This singular choice of location finds its only equivalent in the Pantokrator church in Istanbul. Comparing their similar characteristics, the iconographic programme of New Tokalı may be more akin to the twelfth century [31].

3.3 Iconography, style and technique

Göreme's frescoes are a rich resource regarding Christian iconography [32]. Some of the scenes noted above have no equivalent elsewhere, such as the Pentecost scene. Various scenes from the Christological cycles deserve special note. Thus some scenes, such as "Christ before Hanna and Caiphos" (Kılıçlar), "The calling of Matthew" or "Christ and the poor widow" (New Tokalı) are, within Cappadocia, only found in Göreme. The Pentecost scene and "Magi observe the star" are unique representations in Byzantine monumental painting, and found only in Göreme (New Tokalı) [33].

Of specific iconographic types of Christ and Virgin Mary representations, Göreme offers both unique and the most numerous examples. This is the case for "Christ in Mandorla" (Saklı, Katherina, Karanlık) and "Virgin Mary the Merciful [Eleusa]" (New Tokalı, Karanlık, Çarıklı and Tahtalı; Karabash in Soganlı) [34].

Rarely represented saints are found in Göreme: St Hieron of Matiana (Tokalı, Saklı, Kılıçlar); St Nestor, Simeon Stylites (Tokalı, Saklı); St Peter of Alexandria (Tokalı); and the martyrdom of Eustathios, Agapios and Theophistos (Tokalı). Church N° 3 preserves single representations of 40 martyrs from Sebaste. Twenty-nine martyrs are depicted in New Tokalı [35].

Göreme's paintings date from between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. They therefore offer rich opportunities for stylistic research [36]. So far, research has been confined to trying to group the primary stylistic characteristics and to schedule those by style definitions. The "Yılanlı Group" might be useful as an example, where technical and stylistic analogies include the paintings in the following churches, dated between the second half of the ninth century and the first half of the tenth: Yılanlı, Barbara, Katherina, Daniel, N° 11a, 18 and 28 [37].

Göreme's frescoes provide evidence of an iconographic and stylistic proximity to the capital, as well as to the surrounding regions of the Byzantine empire. Comparing the frescoes of El Nazar, Karanlık, Kılıçlar, Old Tokalı and New Tokalı, the art of the capital has clearly had an influence on Göreme [38]. Other publications indicate influences from Syria, Armenia and Georgia [39].

Little attention has been paid to the technical characteristics of the wall paintings, as almost no basic research has been published on that aspect for Göreme. The first indicative reports were published by Restle [40], and during the restoration works of

the Tokalı frescoes, technical observations were made and published by Epstein [41]. All steps of the Karanlık Kilise restoration are summarized in Ozil's report [42].

4. STATE OF RESEARCH

Our bibliographic reference collection covering Christian monuments in Cappadocia includes 272 publications dated between 1900 and 1993 [43], of which 69 concern monuments of Göreme. Briefly, there are 28 publications concerning one or more monuments of Göreme, of which four are books and 24 are articles [44]. Three of the books are monographs on a single rock-hewn church: Cave on Kılıçlar; Epstein on Old and New Tokalı; and Wiemer-Enis on New Tokalı. All of them were originally dissertations and contain rather superficial descriptions of the wall paintings. The fourth book, by Ipshiroglu and Eyüboğlu, is largely an illustrated general overview of Saklı Kilise.

Of the 24 articles, 15 concern Tokalı and the remaining 9 cover churches N° 10a, 15a, Saklı, Barbara, Çarıklı Refectory and Karanlık [45]. Excluding architectural aspects, the authors' main interest was the wall paintings, analysed according to stylistic and iconographic criteria. Other publications on Göreme cover Tokalı (2 books and 15 essays); Saklı (a book and an essay); Kılıçlar (a book); Karanlık (5 essays); and N° 10a, 15a, Barbara, and Çarıklı (one essay each).

Important edifices such as Elmalı, Çarıklı, Kavanlık and Kılıçlar Kuschluk have been generally neglected because interest has focused on churches containing rich fresco scenes.

Despite numerous relevant publications, the dating of Göreme's monuments remains largely uncertain. Jerphanion, followed by several experts including Epstein, dated the New Tokalı church within the tenth century. The first to criticize this dating was Wiegand; recent, convincing studies by Restle and by Wiemer-Enis date the construction to between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries [46].

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- [6] S.Y. Ötügen. 1980. *Kappadokya bolgesinde Bizans mimarisi arastirmalari*. Ankara: no publ. The 1980 catalogue identifies 687 monuments at 219 locations. More recent publications (1980-93) have increased the monuments to 780 at 244 locations. cf. Hild & Restle, 1988, (*op. cit.*, [5]), who list constructions for 174 locations.
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- [19] Plans 9, 11, 31 & 42 in Rodley, 1985 (*op. cit.*, [9]); cf. Y. Ötüken. 1986. *Buchbesprechung Belleten*, 50: 607-610. Karanlık, Kılıçlar and Aynalı are grouped under "Courtyard Monasteries"; N° 16, 17, 18, 20, 21b, 22, 25, 27 & 28 are grouped under "Monasteries with refectories." Tokalı, instead, is mentioned in the chapter on places for ascetic practice.
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